



STAR **Spangled**

Hotel rooms. Hotel food. Into the bus and out again. A thousand miles of small towns and big crowds. No wonder these women wonder: What's a nice girl group like us doing in a place like this?

It is twelve noon and the Bangles are waking up. One by one, they are shuffling down to the lobby of yet another hotel, schlepping oversized duffel bags and slumping into paisley reproduction wing chairs. Debbi (the blondest one) is holding her stomach and scavenging for aspirin. "Today I am a woman," she says, "and I don't like it." Vicki (the oldest one) is trying to recall her cheerleader technique to avoid bruises like those sustained in concert the night before, when the women dropped to their knees and rolled around the stage floor—their homage to *This Is Spinal Tap*. Susanna (the shortest one) is relating the tale of the killer bee that got into her room last night and had to be wrestled to the ground. "I am never ever going to open a window again," she vows. Michael (the newest one) announces that she will never ever be able to share a stuffy room with Susanna again, and then returns to smelling the inside of her right forearm. A self-described "scent slut"—she meets a new fragrance and instantly abandons her former love—she has managed a quick trip to a local cosmetics counter and is test-driving her new purchase. "The main Bangle fragrances [she smells her wrist] are Devon Violets [she smells the crook of her elbow] and 4711—and [she smells her armpit] Bangle B.O."

It is often at these moments that one of the four, surveying the group and its litany of complaints, will rise from her chair of pain for a little self-mockery and announce in her best TV-news voice: "The Bangles Whine—film at eleven."

Such is life on the road for America's preeminent all-girl band. It is what comes from insomnia on lumpy mattresses in hotels with no bellhops and never enough towels, from two months' worth of clothes stuffed into one pink trunk and no place to do laundry, from making nice with radio disc jockeys presiding over programs like *The Morning Zoo* and TV talk-show hosts wearing orange make-up, from trying to combat the zits and scales produced by pressurized plane cabins, shared cosmetic sponges and touring towns with nothing to eat but foot-long hot dogs and diet cola. It is what comes most especially from being in a tour bus, thousands of miles away from loved ones and beloved possessions, surrounded by screaming strangers with bad manners and worse breath.

And they do all this without drugs.

This is a clean group. Well, they do like their fix of morning TV—on the road, the brain turns to guacamole. And they do mainline extra-strength analgesics for cramps and for the sore spots they sometimes incur when maniacal fans jump out of the audience and grab a Bangle before security guards intervene. They drink a lot more mineral water than anything else, and although they can appreciate a glass of nice wine, they are most often stuck in restaurants that serve "Bobby Mondavi." These girls don't even smoke. This is a *clean* group. In fact, Susanna Hoffs may be the only rock star in history with no cavities.

What they do like are boys. (When I first heard the group's name, I assumed it

BY AIMEE LEE BALL

BANGLES: four for the road



The Bangles (from left to right): Michael Steele, Susanna Hoffs, Debbi Peterson, Vicki Peterson

had something to do with jewelry. Then I heard that the name was originally The Bangs, which I assumed had something to do with hair. When a friend of mine heard this, he asked, "Exactly when did you fall off the turnip truck?") Sometimes the Bangles look out the windows of their bus at guys driving other cars on the road and ooh and aah with delight when they see something they like. It's sort of like window-shopping.

Wherever they go, the Bangles are asked the same two things: the Prince question and the girl question. Almost everyone knows that Prince wrote their hit song "Manic Monday" under the pseudonym "Christopher"—they call this the worst-kept secret in history—because he was an admirer of the group and particularly of petite Susanna. The women are familiar with this question, can see it coming and sometimes entertain themselves with irreverent answers: When a DJ coyly asks, "Who wrote 'Manic Monday'?" they will say "Tony Bennett." As for the other question, almost nobody seems to know, or seems capable of imagining, the dynamics of a rock group composed entirely of women—how it's different from, say, the experience of the

Rolling Stones. So they ask the Bangles: "What's it like? What's it like to be you?"

I'm going to try to answer that one.

Grand Hotel

The phone rings in the band's room. It is tour manager David Russell announcing, "This would be your basic ten-minutes-to-the-lobby call." The Bangles have just arrived in Washington, D.C.—part of a tour that will take them from Salt Lake City to New Orleans, from Omaha to Santa Cruz. ("The party town," says Michael with customary irreverence, "is going to be Boone, North Carolina.")

In every new hotel, the Bangles assume new pseudonyms—today's are Daisy Clover, Roletta Swan, Modesty Blaise and Scout (as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*)—to dissuade overly enthusiastic fans from phoning at 4 A.M. This is not to say they don't enjoy contact with the public. Today, for instance, there is waiting at the front desk a bottle of champagne and an effusive letter from an admiring pair named Chris and Marty. The senders are wine merchants (and the champagne is damn good), and Vicki goes to the phone to thank them and invite them to the next

concert. (Chris and Marty have to leave work early and drive 200 miles, but they make it to the concert—in black tie and tails.)

"Can we do an eating thing?" begs Michael as the group heads out the hotel door. "Can we call ahead and have something waiting in a pie?" They settle for ice-cream cones at a counter that

turns out to be in the entrance to a mall, and suddenly there are cries of "Omigod, we're in a store!" Michael takes off for the perfume counter, Susanna heads for pocketbooks, Vicki searches out sunblock and Debbi disappears. David is running around like the master of a delinquent scout troop, trying to gather his flock, with a look on his face that says: Girls are different from boys.

Very Personal Appearances

In every city on this tour the Bangles are not only performing in concert but also promoting their album with interviews and autograph sessions. Now, after their shopping spree at the mall, they are awaiting the local representative of their record label, who will take them by minivan on their appointed rounds. They could have limousines to-and-fro-ing them, but back in the days when they toured with Cyndi Lauper, they made a decision to economize. CBS Records has advanced them enough money to make their album and to go on the road, but it is only an invest- (continued on page 274)

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ment: Every nickel must eventually be paid back, and it will be paid back out of a profit pool that is set up to benefit the company, not the talent. (For every album sold at a list price of \$8, the Bangles will get \$1. In other words, the band will incur all of the expense and reap one eighth of the reward.)

At a local radio station, the women are ushered into a soundproof room to stand around a microphone and endure the questions they have answered a thousand times: about their name ("Look it up in Webster's—it means 'hang loose'"), about comparisons to the now-defunct Go Go's ("We're also compared to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir"), about their musical influences ("The Beatles, the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield—all the B list"). They tape a seasonal greeting to be used by the station when it is not 75 degrees outside ("Hi, this is the Bangles, wishing you a Merry Christmas and a great New Year") and they don't bat an eye when asked to introduce a song by Madonna.

At the next radio station, the women find themselves standing on the sidewalk outside a locked building, prompting them to yell a mock interview up at the windows ("Hey, we're the Bangles, and we're coming to you from the street"). A young man in a dark blue suit finally admits them ("We didn't know there was a dress code," deadpans Debbi). This time they take calls from listeners: A young woman admits she wanted to attend the Bangles' concert but her mother wouldn't let her. "Put your mother on the phone," commands Vicki. The DJ tries to incite a male caller with the prospect of a date with a Bangle. "You bring the whipped cream," he says. "We'll bring the K-Y jelly," says Vicki. Before they leave, the DJ poses for photographs with the band—lying across their laps on a leather bench.

Then there is the TV taping: all four of them locked in an airless cubicle with a makeup woman who is trying everything short of surgery to remove the circles from under their eyes. (They are in their mid-twenties, but chronic lack of sleep takes its toll on anyone.) Susanna has a habit of falling in love with cameramen: fat, bald, it doesn't matter—she likes cameramen. This one wants to know, "What part of California are you girls from? I'm from Oxnard." Michael reluctantly concedes Newport Beach as home—"a city of rich, conservative people whose children take too many drugs and die in sports cars. Other than that, it's a lovely place."

Finally, the Bangles hit a record store down the street from the White House, where they sign albums for a crowd that has circled the block. The four women are seated at a long table, handed fat black

markers, and the deluge begins. People of every size, shape, age and sex—some of indeterminate sex—hand over freshly purchased records, and not just records. In the course of an hour they are asked to autograph posters, ticket stubs, photographs, loose-leaf paper torn in half, old Beatles albums, issues of *Time* and *Rolling Stone*, T-shirts, blue jeans and bodies. One man wearing a tie and striped shirt asks them to sign his bare arm. Another hands them a self-addressed stamped postcard and says, "I want you to send that from someplace on the road." A shy man asks Vicki to kiss his ear. (She does.) Another asks her to cut off a lock of hair. (She doesn't.)

That Manic Preconcert Panic

At five o'clock, there is a rehearsal for the evening's concert, attended by the various technicians referred to as sound-and-light geezers, played in an enormous auditorium to an audience of one: me. Dinner is laid out backstage—vats of lasagna, platters of raw vegetables and three kinds of cake: carrot, lemon and cheese. I have never seen four skinny girls eat so much food. As Michael decimates her dessert, someone says, "Have you ever considered construction work?" At the beginning of the tour, the hours before a performance were a time of considerable nervous energy. Now, the women are fairly relaxed and eat what they want, although Debbi says, "Sometimes I open my mouth to sing and out comes burp, burp, burp."

Outside the dressing room, fans are standing on garbage cans and handing autograph albums through the window. The women are gracious until someone with a flash camera opens a window and catches a Bangle in mid-pantyhose—then a guard is dispensed to stand duty. The dressing room is constructed of bare wood and bare bulbs. There is a humidifier, which Vicki declares "wimpy"—she is inhaling the hard stuff over a steaming tea kettle. There is a giant tub filled with ice and stocked with soda. There are bowls of salted nuts, trail mix and M & M's—plain and peanut. Vicki opens a can of cola and the pop-top goes *pssttt*. "Ah," she says, "my favorite sound."

"Woody Allen says that by the year 2000, junk food will be good for you," someone says.

"That was in *Sleeper*," says someone else. "I remember the orgasmatron."

"Can we get that for the bus?"

"An orgasmatron?"

"Well, I meant the movie, but that's a good idea, too."

There are weird sounds emanating from the dressing room. Susanna is vocalizing to a tape of piano notes on a Walkman—first a kind of tongue roll that sounds like gargling, then an eee-eee-eee

that sounds like Casper the Ghost. "Those aren't even the most disgusting ones," says Vicki. "You should hear the Edith Bunker projection." Vicki is reading a magazine article about their former tour-mate and avid booster, Cyndi Lauper. "'Girls Just Want to Have Fun' was only number two," she reads. "Remember that, kids." Debbi and Michael are amusing themselves by inventing names for a punk all-girl band, like Pap Smear, or Toxic Shock and the Syndromes.

The Bangles dressing for a concert looks like a sale at some intergalactic Salvation Army. They love a bargain, and they're all different sizes, so the wardrobe trunk holds an eclectic mix, with a shared hodgepodge of belts, scarves, and, yes, bangles. "People used to throw them onstage," says Vicki. "It got painful." Now they throw underpants.

Tour manager David approaches with news about the status of "Manic Monday," currently ranked third on the pop charts. "Hands up, everybody who has the number-three song in the country," David says. Debbi, Sue, Vick and Mick tentatively raise their hands. "Wrongggg!" he says. "It's number two." Tremendous cheering all around, except Susanna. "It's a B plus," she says. "What can we do to hit number one?" There are various suggestions.

"Strip onstage."

"Create an international incident."

"Sacrifice a journalist."

"One of us should marry Prince."

"One of us should die."

When it is time to sing, the band is led onstage in darkness by crew members wearing badges with a photograph of several topless musicians and the caption Another Average American All-Girl Band. When they come offstage an hour later, the audience is holding up lighted matches, begging for more, and the women are handed towels to soak up the sweat. "If I ever made my own perfume," says Michael, "it would smell like a leather guitar strap and damp underwear."

The women feel connected to their audience and, in many ways, miss the scrounging days of playing at small clubs like the Whisky A Go Go, with people's faces just inches away. Now Debbi looks out from her drum set on a center section of record executives with free tickets, and she hates it. During one concert, a guy in the front row yawned and Vicki yelled, "I saw that!" Michael once heard a disgruntled type say something obscene and replied, "It's a shame when cousins marry."

The Late, Late Show

"Backstage after a show," says Susanna, "it's like *Animal House*—we're all talking at once. Sometimes it looks like one body

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with four heads." There is some dissection of the evening's performance—even though this band has played together for four years and is so close that they all get their periods at the same time, continual fine-tuning is necessary to stay fresh. I asked why they don't sing the increasingly popular "Walk Like an Egyptian" cut off their album. "It felt like sex with a condom," says Michael, "so we stopped doing it." But when the audience stands for the whole concert, it is wonderfully satisfying. "It's fun to be popular," says Susanna. "It's like God's reward for being a geek in high school."

Debbi has retrieved the cold pack she's left soaking in the tub with the cans of soda: She gets "drummer's knee," a painful inflammation that must be iced down after a show. The compensation, she says, is never needing a bra: Drumming makes for firm breasts. Vicki is putting on flannel pajama bottoms and terry-cloth slippers. "Sometime we ought to do a pajama-party concert," she speculates. "We could sell tickets to girls, sing about boys, pass out popcorn." Tonight, they are stopping at a Holiday Inn to take team showers (one gets out, another gets in) and to take out their contact lenses. Debbi is wandering around the room with a jar of cold cream in one hand and a glass of white wine in the other—the Albolene and Chablis hour—mumbling, "This is certainly my favorite part of the evening."

Later, the Bangles will board their tour bus and attempt to sleep on an eight-hour drive through the night to Atlanta. It is a fitful business, sleeping on the road. "I wake up dreaming of potholes and exit ramps," says Michael. Daylight hours on the bus are spent in trivial pursuits. They read ("We have a complete lending library of Sidney Sheldon," says Susanna), watch movies on the VCR (current favorites are *Scarface* and *Starman*) and listen to golden oldies (albums from Patsy Cline and Creedence Clearwater Revival—"we get 'em at truck stops for a dollar ninety-nine," says Susanna). One of the drawbacks of the road is that you can't go to anyone else's concerts—the rock star's equivalent of reading a professional journal.

But the road can also hold wonderful moments. The women have gotten accustomed to hearing their own voices coming out of the radio, and they joke that it takes them longer to recognize the Bangles than other groups. But once they were standing on a street corner, and a convertible with several cute guys pulled up at a red light right in front of them, and the guys were singing "Manic Monday" along with the radio.

Now, that's fun. □

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CIGARETTE CHIC

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smoking, to nicotine, differently than men do? Does it give them a different kick—help them to relax in some way?

What we know so far is that burning tobacco generates thousands of different compounds, the most essential of which is nicotine. Nicotine reaches the brain within seconds, altering brain waves and perhaps affecting the way we process information. Alexander Glassman, M.D., a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University in New York City, has been researching nicotine's effect on biochemical systems in the brain, and has also worked with women who want to quit smoking. "It does seem, from the studies available, that women find it more difficult to stop," he says. "And this suggests that they are more vulnerable to the use of tobacco from a biological point of view."

Researchers like Glassman speculate that women may metabolize nicotine differently. Others think the problem may lie in the fact that we respond to our environments differently than men do. Women pay more attention to detail and we have much greater verbal ability when it comes to emotion. And we also pick up more information via the senses.

Recent studies conducted by Drs. Keith Wesnes and David Warburton, psychologists at the University of Reading, England, have shown that nicotine speeds up the processing of sensory information—helping people evaluate sensory input more quickly. There is, as yet, no evidence that women are more vulnerable to nicotine than men. But it stands to reason that if women are naturally given to processing sensory information, they'd occasionally be more in need of a substance that helps them to "step back," to process this information more efficiently.

If you are a smoker and love smoking, it's hard to keep the big picture in mind. There are, after all, so many compelling reasons to go on smoking—because it feels good, because it's fun and, sometimes, because it's easy to believe, at 27 or even at 35, that there's still time. As one smoker says, "I still feel like it's okay to smoke. I don't have any bad symptoms, so I feel safe." And then there are all sorts of little reasons for not stopping, like the fear of gaining weight. And, of course, there's still something ineffably romantic about cigarette smoking. "I love the way a cigarette looks in my hand," says one 30-year-old executive. "Especially if my nails are painted and I have a drink in my hand. I just love that forties movie image—a woman with a cigarette is fast and sophisticated."

It's important, then, to look closely at our smoking habits. For, finally, if it is true that we are more susceptible to nicotine addiction, then the smokers among us will, at some point down the road, pay a price that is For Women Only. □

SEDUCING ALICE

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ter, a Texas oil woman who played the piano. Suddenly, she paused and began talking about George and Ira Gershwin, and their sister, Frances. It was clear to Findlay that she had not exactly forgotten what she had been talking about, but had simply thought of something that interested her more, and after a while this led to her singing "Love Is Here to Stay"—a favorite of both her aunt and Frances Gershwin. Alice sang it not at all drunkenly, but simply, quietly, intent on making some mysterious point. Findlay found this all immensely, implausibly touching.

When she left the lodge that night, Findlay went to the window and watched her walk across the snowy field toward her cabin; she wore a ground-length coat. That was when he knew for certain, that after being her friend, he was now in love with her, had been in love with her for some time—he didn't even know how long. There had been nothing extraordinary about her that night—except, possibly, the fact that she knew most of the words to "Love Is Here to Stay" and that she had been so simply herself. Just as Findlay thought this, she turned, saw him at the window and waved. He said the words out loud, "I love you," and a wide circle of fog appeared on the glass.

Now, steam followed her out the bathroom door, and the temperature of the room seemed to change as she entered. She was robed, her hair turbaned in a blue towel. She walked between the beds, sat on the edge of the cleared one, took the cognac from the night table, drank straight from the bottle and looked at him.

"You've been crying," he said.

"Only a little," she said. "I virtually squeezed them out. And now I'm very, very clean."

He went to the bed, sat next to her. Their knees touched. "Findlay—" she began.

"Did I tell you that there was a rainbow over the airport the other day when I met your plane?" he asked.

"You're making that up," she said.

Findlay thought he felt the hotel shake. He assumed it must have been the whole borough and not just that one building. How mysterious, he thought, one hand now on her leg, the other at the small of her back.

"I just don't ever want to hurt you," she said, and he felt, through his hands, something change inside her.

"We'll manage," he said as he unturbaned the towel. Her hair fell everywhere at once. □

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